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at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/48/21 and A/48/407)

1. Mr. POPESCU (Romania) said that the debate on questions relating to information was all the more timely in the light of the acute problems confronting the United Nations with regard to its prestige and its work. If the criticisms to which the Organization was frequently subjected were justified, its mission and the way in which that mission was carried out, given the resources available, would have to be redefined. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had pointed out in his introductory statement, the value of the information transmitted by the Department of Public Information depended primarily on the way in which the public understood the role of the United Nations as a unique forum for collective solutions to global problems.

2. The current revolution in technology called for the reformulation of United Nations information policies, which should be based on clear and realistic priorities; it was also important to ensure the necessary flexibility in the use of resources, in order to permit a timely response to unexpected events. The limited resources available to the Department made it necessary to rationalize its methods and modernize its technology. The re-examination of relations between the Department and the external media could lead to the economization of resources and their redeployment for other purposes.

3. On the question of improving the methods of work of the Committee on Information, it would be useful for the Department to submit concrete proposals. At its next session, the Committee on Information could hold fewer meetings and discuss topical issues in an informal framework which would encourage a more productive exchange of views.

4. It was regrettable that for security reasons the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was not able to fulfil its envisaged role as a cultural centre.

5. Freedom of expression and the free dissemination of information were playing an important role in the reconstruction of Romania. Information was a powerful instrument for its people, which enabled them to participate in the difficult process of reshaping their society. Romania needed to be able to count on the support of the international community in promoting democratic values, and in particular in the building of a democratic society. While pursuing the development of independent pluralistic media, Romania was also seeking to diversify its sources of information.

6. With regard to the United Nations information centres, he said that under the former regime the Bucharest centre had for almost 20 years represented the only open window to the outer world. The information provided on the various fields of United Nations activity was a valuable asset for the recipients. The centre, which had benefited from the material and financial support of the Government despite the difficulties faced by Romania, was one of the 18 centres which were to be integrated with UNDP field offices. His delegation, which was following closely the implementation of that initiative, would soon make its

(Mr. Popescu, Romania)

views known, taking into account the need to maintain the functional autonomy of the centre in accordance with the provisions of the General Assembly resolution 47/73 B.

7. His delegation supported the recommendations of the Committee on Information, including the two draft resolutions.

8. Mr. BATAINEH (Jordan) said that the fundamental changes which had occurred in international relations had created a new climate, necessitating a new basis for cooperation in the field of information. Almost all countries were working with rather than against each other, which could only contribute to the well-being of mankind. Both developed and developing countries should work together with a view to establishing new means of communication which would allow for a mutual exchange of values, knowledge and ideas. A flow of information in one direction only prevented developing countries from cooperating fully in all fields with developed countries, although it was recognized that cooperation between North and South was essential for economic development at the national and global levels. Jordan, which respected the principles of freedom of the press, freedom of expression and pluralism of the media, considered that there was an urgent need to establish a new world information order which would be impartial, just and balanced. His delegation hoped that the developed countries, which collected and disseminated information by means of powerful financial and technical resources, would assume their responsibilities and endeavour to reduce the disparity between themselves and the developing countries by transferring vital technology and by providing assistance in the field of training.

9. The role of the Department of Public Information should be strengthened so that it could create a stronger awareness that the United Nations was more than a political forum and a mechanism for the maintenance of international peace and security. It was also a system of programmes and activities intended to serve the needs of the peoples of the world. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had said at the fifteenth session of the Committee on Information, it was essential that the peoples of the world should be aware that the various bodies of the United Nations were working for their well-being, for otherwise those bodies would be unable to carry out their mandate.

10. It was essential to continue the publication of information on all questions relating to security, to respect for human rights and to economic and social issues, which required a strengthening of cooperation between the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information. The Department had important tasks to carry out, in particular that of ensuring coverage and promotion of important meetings to be held in 1994 and 1995. In that respect, his delegation approved of the decision of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development that the Secretary-General should set out clearly the programmes which the Department of Public Information was to carry out in cooperation with other competent bodies.

11. His delegation welcomed the action taken by UNESCO in the field of information, particularly the seminars which it was organizing in cooperation with the Department of Public Information on the promotion of a free and

(Mr. Bataineh, Jordan)

pluralistic media, and hoped that the seminar for Middle Eastern journalists would be held at Sana'a in 1995, as proposed by Yemen.

12. With respect to the experimental integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, it would be advisable to wait for the report which the Secretary-General was to submit to the Committee on Information at its sixteenth session, in the hope that that report would reflect the views of both host and member countries and of those who feared that such integration might be detrimental to centres located in developing countries. The normalization of the situation in Lebanon gave grounds for hope that a director would be appointed to the Beirut information centre. The current geographical location of centres around the world should be reviewed. His delegation favoured the opening of an information centre in Sana'a, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/73 B.

13. Mr. MISHRA (India) said that information played an important role in the functioning of the United Nations. It had recently become apparent that media focus on certain situations could mobilize public opinion and lead to swift action by the United Nations. It had also been demonstrated that the United Nations devoted less attention to certain questions on which the media did not focus, as it was not under pressure from public opinion.

14. Televised reporting of civil wars and emergency situations showed what the United Nations did and did not do; its activity had never been so closely followed by the public.

15. With the end of the cold war, the United Nations was confronted by new responsibilities and was being relied on to find collective solutions. The demands and expectations it had to meet were straining its capacity. Such unfulfilled expectations could undermine its credibility. The public information policies of the United Nations must therefore be changed in order to give a more accurate idea of its capacities. In the face of the numerous challenges it must cope with, the Department of Public Information had already taken a number of steps and adopted new approaches and methods of work, as outlined by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. His delegation supported those measures. It hoped, however, that the Department would provide more detailed responses to journalists' questions during press briefings, that press releases would be concise and issued more promptly, that the quality of publications would be improved and that periodicals and The Yearbook of the United Nations would be published on time. Development Forum was useful and its publication should be resumed. The Department should also focus greater attention on development issues and on Africa.

16. The imbalance in the expenditures made by the Department for its information centres in developed and developing countries must be corrected. The network of centres in the developing countries should be expanded and well-defined procedures should govern the opening of new centres.

17. The information component in peace-keeping operations was extremely important, particularly in situations such as the one in Somalia, for it was designed to keep the local population informed of the objectives and the various aspects of the operations. On the other hand, when the dominant news agency in

(Mr. Mishra, India)

the field showed signs of partiality, United Nations policy-makers were not made aware of the reactions of the population. The Department of Public Information should bridge that gap. It was unfortunate that, for security reasons, guided tours had been suspended and the plan to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a cultural centre could not be implemented.

18. India had an extremely vigilant press. The information and communications infrastructure were vital to the defence of democracy, economic development and social progress in developing countries. The developed countries should respond positively to the appeals of UNESCO for funds for the development of communications in the developing countries. The Department of Public Information should work closely with UNESCO. India supported the offer of the Republic of Yemen to host a regional conference on information and was prepared to make its excellent training facilities and the intermediate technologies it had adapted to the needs of the developing countries more available to them.

19. Mr. VALDES (Cuba) said he shared the view of the Colombian delegation that the Committee on Information, in accordance with its established mandate, should formulate such recommendations as it deemed necessary to ensure more effective functioning of the Department of Public Information.

20. Once the General Assembly adopted the two draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information, they would constitute a set of clear, specific guidelines on the form that the new world information and communication order should take. The Department of Public Information could not be modernized and restructured without the direct and active participation of Member States, particularly the developing countries.

21. The existence of free, independent media that reflected the interests of all sectors of society was a prerequisite for the free circulation of information - impartial, balanced information. And yet, the situation was currently one of monopoly, in which the media of the more developed countries sought to impose on the developing countries lifestyles that were very far removed from their history and their daily reality. Cuba agreed with those delegations which had expressed concern about the serious consequences that could arise from that situation.

22. He noted with satisfaction that the report of the Committee on Information (A/48/21, para. 27) referred to the protests his delegation had repeatedly lodged against the Marti radio and television broadcasts, which were a violation of its sovereignty.

23. The new world order which had already sparked so much discussion had not translated into too many tangible results thus far. Every day, developing countries were increasingly relegated to the role of spectators, or even of agents carrying out decisions in which they had had no say. They thus pinned all their hopes on the bodies of the United Nations, the only forum where their voice could be heard and they could aspire to a role as full and equal partners in decision-making.

(Mr. Valdes, Cuba)

24. Concerning the rationalization of the functioning of the Department, he agreed that all would stand to benefit if the Committee on Information fulfilled its mandates more effectively. Every effort must be made, however, not to compromise the attainment of the objectives defined in the name of economizing, thereby undermining the Committee's credibility.

25. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that the profound changes that had taken place on the international scene in the past five years had rekindled the hopes of many peoples. However, even as a new spirit of cooperation was emerging, certain regions were being ravaged by fresh conflicts. The international community must build on the new political situation in order to restore peace.

26. Underscoring the pivotal role that information could play in helping to bring peoples together, he said that only a new world information order based on a balanced flow of information could help to achieve peace, progress and prosperity. It was regrettable that, because of their considerable resources and their technological advantage, the developed countries had a monopoly on the gathering and dissemination of information. The world might remain unaware of the extraordinary diversity of mankind and of approaches to development if the developing countries were unable to share their experiences. The developing countries must be included in the establishment of a new world information order, benefit from the transfer of technology and have access to know-how. The new spirit of reciprocity which characterized international relations must also prevail in the information sector. The Pakistani press and foreign news agencies alike enjoyed complete freedom.

27. While it appreciated the efforts of the Department to ensure the timely issue of its major publications, his delegation was concerned about the suspension of the publication entitled Development Forum and hoped it would be revived at the earliest possible date. The decision to integrate certain information centres with UNDP offices might have an adverse impact.

28. In conclusion, he urged the faithful implementation of the decisions and priorities identified in the report of the Committee on Information (A/48/21).

29. Mr. ALVAREZ (Uruguay) said that the many new tasks recently undertaken by the United Nations called for a change in Department of Public Information strategy; it was important to make the public aware of the Organization's successes, which on the whole greatly outweighed its failures. Public information activities were too important to be put on the back burner, even for financial reasons. Through in-depth analysis of the Department's calendar of activities, it should be possible to achieve cost containment and a balanced budget, as well as to review the mandates of the Committee on Information on a regular basis in order to ensure that they coincided with the assigned priorities.

30. In the view of his delegation, the growing technological imbalance between the developed and the developing countries made it important to increase the transfer of technology and to determine the part that the United Nations system should play in that process.

(Mr. Alvarez, Uruguay)

31. With respect to public information activities relating to peace-keeping operations, his delegation considered appropriate the recent publication of a booklet on current peace-keeping operations. In that connection, it recommended rethinking the format of the book The Blue Helmets. In view of the increased number of peace-keeping operations, it might be best to divide it into a first volume on completed operations, for which the data were not subject to change, and a second volume on ongoing operations, for which the data could then be updated more easily.

32. He was satisfied with the Department's television coverage of the elections in Cambodia, the World Conference on Human Rights and the referendum in Eritrea. However, he agreed with the view expressed by various delegations that it was necessary to disseminate more information on United Nations development activities. In that connection, he suggested drawing up a list of the activities scheduled in the context of the World Summit for Social Development for consideration by the Committee on Information at its next session.

33. With respect to the integration of United Nations information centres with other United Nations offices, it was necessary to define the criteria much more cautiously. Although it was desirable to try to achieve savings, integration should not compromise the functioning of the information centres. Given the financial and even institutional implications of such an initiative, any decision should be taken in cooperation with the Fifth Committee and the Secretariat.

34. Mr. RODRIGUE (Haiti) fully endorsed the statement of the Group of 77. His country had been in the international news spotlight since the coup d'état of 30 September 1991. Outside the capital, however, the only information available to the people came through clever propaganda crafted by the coup's perpetrators.

35. Organizations and individuals had made ingenious efforts to establish small information networks to alert international public opinion to the massive violations of human rights and the crimes committed against the civilian population. The Department of Public Information had supplied programmes to the few local radio stations still operating and to the short-wave stations that reached Haiti. It had also disseminated information on the Haitian crisis in the Caribbean countries.

36. Although his delegation thoroughly appreciated the value of those efforts, it thought that the Department of Public Information could do more, in particular by fully implementing General Assembly resolution 38/82 B on programming in French/Creole.

37. The success of the United Nations various intervention programmes in Haiti depended to a great extent on information, since balanced information was a fundamental tool for combating ignorance and teaching civic values and democratic principles.

(Mr. Rodrique, Haiti)

38. After outlining what the information and communication policy of the Haitian Government would be once democracy was restored, he described the measures the Government would take in the field of information to encourage Haitians to stay in Haiti, and he reiterated the need to establish a United Nations information centre at Port-au-Prince.

39. Mr. KHORRAMI (Afghanistan) welcomed the launching of the International Programme for the Development of Communication sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In his view, UNESCO could play a central role in the development of communication infrastructures in developing countries.

40. All nations - big or small, developed or less developed - wanted open access to information. However, insufficient transfer of technology and know-how, limited resources and, in some cases, unending armed conflict had prevented some countries from achieving that goal. Those countries required special assistance from the United Nations and donor countries and institutions in the information and communication field.

41. In Afghanistan, a bloody 15-year war had practically destroyed the existing infrastructures, including radio and television stations and printing facilities. In that connection, he invited the competent departments of the United Nations to give careful study to the sections of the Action Plan for Immediate Rehabilitation of Afghanistan prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that dealt with the information and communication sectors.

42. In accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, the Afghan Government was endeavouring to lay the legal and constitutional foundation for an open society based on the principles of freedom of information, expression and opinion. That was why, despite the country's current difficulties, the Afghan Government had taken the steps required to ensure the emergence of new, independent media. The Afghan Journalist Association included independent journalists, and the correspondents of the principal international news agencies had free access to all parts of the country.

43. His delegation welcomed with satisfaction the draft resolution entitled "Information in service of humanity" and requested the competent bodies of the United Nations and donor countries to give urgent priority to assisting Afghanistan in its efforts to rebuild and develop its communication and broadcasting infrastructure and to provide it with support for the training of radio and television technicians and broadcasters. To that end, it might be useful for UNESCO to send a team of experts to Afghanistan in order to evaluate the country's most urgent needs and report its findings to the competent United Nations bodies.

44. In conclusion, he said that only a new international information and communication order based on justice, cooperation and equal access to technology would enable the international community to meet the challenges of the post-cold-war era.

45. Mr. MWAMBULUKUTU (United Republic of Tanzania) welcomed the openness demonstrated by the new Department of Public Information team under the leadership of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, Mr. Vianello-Chiodo, who had called on the Member States and the Secretariat to join forces to preserve the image of the United Nations and to foster a clearer understanding of its actions and goals.

46. Tanzania shared the concerns expressed by the Chairman of the Group of 77. In the view of his delegation, the Department should continue to disseminate information about the international struggle against apartheid until a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa was in place. Similarly, it should continue disseminating information about United Nations activities in the Middle East until a definitive solution to the question of Palestine had been achieved.

47. As far as the United Nations information centres were concerned, he had no doubt that the Department was working hard to establish a new centre at Sana'a (Yemen) and to enhance the centres at Tehran, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and Dhaka. He pointed out, however, that the post of Director of the Dar es Salaam Centre had been vacant for 18 years, which obviously hampered the Centre's operation. If the reason for that state of affairs was financial, how was it to be explained that the Secretariat had been able to find the resources for establishing new centres? The historic importance of Dar es Salaam was obvious: the OAU Liberation Committee had its seat there and it was an important broadcasting centre for the African liberation movements, including ANC and PAC. It therefore deserved a fully operational centre, complete with the director and staff needed for its proper operation, especially as the Organization was increasingly involved in the region, inter alia, through the peace-keeping operations in Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa.

48. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that, unfortunately, the end of the cold war had not brought about peace and harmony in the world. It was well known that information and communication played a crucial role in promoting peace, stability, economic development, social justice and international cooperation. It was necessary, therefore, for the Department of Public Information to recast its priorities in the light of recent developments. At the same time, there should be a rationalized reallocation of resources to make the Organization's activities and operations better known. In that connection, he recalled that his country was one of the major troop-contributors to peace-keeping operations. The people of Bangladesh were therefore entitled to wish to be kept up to date on the progress of operations in which Bangladeshi units took part. The publication of illustrated booklets and leaflets would help to inform the people about the role played by the United Nations in promoting peace and security in the world. Given the increased responsibility of the United Nations, it was more important than ever to make people more aware of its performance and therefore to strengthen its information organs. In that connection, his delegation urged the Department of Public Information to take the necessary steps to appoint a full-time director to head the Dhaka Information Centre.

49. His delegation believed that the establishment of a new world information and communication order was inseparable from the establishment of a new political and economic order, which alone could ensure that the information disseminated was balanced, unbiased and objective.

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

50. Since it regarded information as an essential tool of democracy and a vehicle for development, the Government of Bangladesh had affirmed its commitment to respect freedom of the press and freedom of expression and opinion. To aid it in those efforts, the United Nations and UNESCO could help Bangladesh to improve its information infrastructure and capabilities by the provision of training and the transfer of technology.

51. Mr. ABDERAHMAN (Egypt) said that the consideration of the agenda item on information took on special importance at the current session because United Nations activities in that field were on the increase owing to the multiplication of the Organization's activities, especially in regard to peace-keeping. Unfortunately, the public image of the Organization was not always positive, sometimes as the result of biased judgements but also because the information disseminated on United Nations missions was not up to date. Egypt accordingly wholeheartedly supported the efforts of the Department of Public Information to carry out its mandate in parallel with what the Secretary-General called the second generation of United Nations activities after the end of the cold war.

52. Because of budget constraints, the Department of Public Information must set priorities in accordance with its mandates in order to carry out its task more effectively.

53. Activities for the dissemination of information in the developed countries must not be at the expense of those in the developing countries. In the developed countries, those activities could be financed out of voluntary contributions or the sale of goods and services. The Department should therefore pursue its programme for the dissemination of information in Africa and part of the funds that had been devoted to the campaign against apartheid could be used for other programmes related to security and development in Africa. After the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the Department should inform the public of the advantages that would ensue from its implementation.

54. His delegation welcomed the establishment of new information centres and the enhancing of the capacity of the centres already existing in the developing countries, but believed that thought should be given to the possibility of making the new centres to be established in developed countries self-financing. His delegation also supported the idea that the United Nations should equip itself with the capability to broadcast information throughout the world, in parallel with the programmes it broadcast through installations in member countries. Egypt, for its part, was cooperating fully with the Organization in that field, in particular in connection with UNOSOM.

55. His delegation welcomed the active part played by the Department of Public Information in the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in Cairo in 1994.

(Mr. Abderahman, Egypt)

56. Egypt was aware that the task of the Department of Public Information was no easy one and that there were many material and political obstacles in its way. It was therefore resolved to contribute to strengthening cooperation and dialogue between the Department of Public Information and the States members of the Committee on Information with a view to removing those obstacles.

57. Mr. MENZIES (United States of America) congratulated the Committee on Information on the excellent draft resolution before the Committee, which stressed the importance of freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The United States wholeheartedly endorsed the efforts of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information to rationalize the management of the Department.

58. Considerable savings could be made through the elimination of duplication by discontinuing certain publications. The integration of United Nations information centres into UNDP field offices should be continued and some centres might well be consolidated in a regional centre. The United States was, however, in favour of opening a new centre at Sana'a. It was also important to establish clear and measurable objectives that would assist in making choices in the allocation of resources.

59. The useful dialogue between the Department of Public Information and the Committee on Information, whose role was essential in improving the functioning of the Organization, should be intensified. The Department should display flexibility and, with the Committee's help, identify new priorities. The information component of peace-keeping operations should be strengthened, possibly by drawing upon experts from Member States. The United States could call on the expertise of the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Information Agency and the Agency for International Development.

60. Ms. ABDELHADY (Observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization) said that information was a vital channel for communication and understanding among peoples. Its influence on society was immense, as it affected the decisions taken in various fields: social, political, economic, technological and cultural. Information could play a decisive role in international relations and could be quite effective in furthering the interests of nations. For that reason, the Department of Public Information (DPI) should maintain and develop its special programme on Palestine, which had been useful in raising the awareness of the international community of the complexities of that question, the plight of the Palestinian people and the situation in the region in general. It had also contributed to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue. DPI had fulfilled the mandate given to it in General Assembly resolution 47/64 C. It was to be hoped that the fact-finding mission for journalists to the region, including the occupied territory, would take place as soon as possible.

61. In the light of recent events, it was clear that DPI still had an important role to play in furthering the Palestinian cause. The signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington on 13 September 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel, which had been preceded by mutual recognition by the two sides, constituted a major step towards the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. The road towards peace would be a difficult one, however. It

(Ms. Abdelhady, Observer, PLO)

included the need to accomplish similar progress on other aspects of the negotiations and the need for the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles, in accordance with the agreed timetable. Most important were the final negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, to commence as soon as possible but not later than the third year of the interim period, on several crucial elements of the final settlement. Those elements included the status of Jerusalem and the rights of the Palestinian refugees, and the public and journalists should be kept informed.

62. In the context of the negotiations, DPI activities, which would have to take account of the new developments, would be even more valuable. Such activities might involve directing the attention of the international media to the peace process, including the immediate achievements and the progress towards important long-term goals. The most important of the latter was the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including its right to self-determination and to establish its own State. DPI could also help to focus attention on the development and reconstruction needs of the Palestinian people.

63. During the new phase, DPI should provide assistance for developing Palestinian media and training Palestinian journalists and other media specialists, possibly in cooperation with various international media organizations. It might also be possible to offer training for Palestinian journalists during the session of the General Assembly.

64. DPI should also continue to publicize the activities of the United Nations system and its expected enlarged role in the reconstruction of Palestinian society during the interim period. The special programme on Palestine should therefore reflect the new situation, while continuing to disseminate information about the just cause of the Palestinian people and to support the negotiations. The United Nations would remain seized of the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace was attained.

65. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 47/64 C by an overwhelming majority. Her delegation hoped that the relevant draft resolution would be adopted by consensus at the current session, for it would be difficult to understand opposition to the continuation of such a valuable programme at a time when the negotiations were entering a crucial phase for the future of the Palestinian people.

66. Mr. MOUSSAWI (Lebanon) expressed appreciation for the activities of the Department of Public Information. The task before the Department now was to restore the recently tarnished reputation of the United Nations, which nevertheless remained a source of hope for peoples in distress. It was often unfairly accused of applying different criteria according to the parties involved, of being incapable of enforcing its resolutions and of being used as a screen for the policies of certain permanent members of the Security Council. As the Secretary-General had stated, United Nations action was no more than the expression of the will of its Member States, and although it was not able to satisfy all needs, it remained, despite the difficulties encountered, the only political forum in which the goals set forth in the Charter of the United Nations could be attained.

(Mr. Moussawi, Lebanon)

67. The number of United Nations information centres should be increased in order to make the public more aware of the Organization's activities. For that reason, it was urgent to appoint a new director to the United Nations Information Centre in Beirut. Lebanon was aware that the network of information centres was in the process of being reorganized and hoped that the Beirut centre, which was the principal centre for the Arab world and even for the entire Middle East, would be maintained. Finally, Lebanon paid a tribute to the journalists who had paid with their lives for practising their profession in dangerous regions.

68. Mr. KARAMOY (Indonesia) said that the Fourth Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Pyong Yang (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) from 15 to 18 June 1993, had discussed the implementation of decisions adopted at the Tenth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held in 1992 at Jakarta, and the Third Conference of Ministers of Information, held at Havana (Cuba) in 1990. The participants had agreed on the urgent need of developing countries to modernize their communications systems and to establish, in the framework of the new world information and communication order, an international code of conduct to deal with the impact of foreign programmes rebroadcast by satellite. The Conference had advocated the strengthening of the programme of cooperation while at the same time respecting the right of each country to develop an independent national information network, since the role of information and communication was vital for the preservation of a nation's identity, traditions and cultural and ethical values. The non-aligned countries had also underscored the importance of information in their continuing efforts against foreign domination and racism to bring durable peace and prosperity to humanity. The Declaration adopted by the Conference had emphasized the need to intensify cooperation among developing countries and to increase national information capabilities and the flow of information among them. The Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies (NANAP) and the Broadcasting Organization of the Non-Aligned Countries (BONAC), organized by the Movement, worked to strengthen the national news agencies, to promote the exchange of radio and television programmes and of media representatives, to develop communication infrastructures, to satisfy training needs and to reduce communication tariffs. The non-aligned countries also intended to increase their cooperation with the Department of Public Information, IPDC/UNESCO and other agencies. The Conference had also recommended the establishment of a communications satellite (NAMSAT) which would make it possible to broadcast better-balanced programmes on the developing countries. At the end of November 1993, Indonesia would be hosting the meeting of a working group on long-term projections of the use and application of modern technology by the mass media in non-aligned countries.

69. The United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta was highly appreciated; on the occasion of the forty-eighth anniversary of the United Nations, it had released a new publication in Indonesian and English entitled "The United Nations and Indonesia" and was planning the publication of another brochure ("United Nations and Indonesia in Pictures").

70. As part of its efforts to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation, Indonesia had convened a seminar in August 1993 on the function of the press and public relations in developing countries, attended by information experts from

(Mr. Karamoy, Indonesia)

17 developing countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Kenya, Laos, Maldives, Morocco, Myanmar, Pakistan, Singapore, Suriname, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe and Indonesia).

71. Mr. BRATINKA (Czech Republic) said that his delegation had originally intended to speak on various matters relating to information, but since the Department of Public Information was determined to close the United Nations Information Centre at Prague, he would focus his remarks on that question. Czechoslovakia, the predecessor State of the Czech Republic, had been a founding Member of the United Nations. The building of a stable democracy following the profound political and economic changes which had occurred had created new opportunities for the greater involvement of the Czech Republic in the activities of the United Nations. The United Nations Information Centre at Prague, established in December 1947, was one of the 10 oldest information centres and was called upon to play an important role. Since the creation of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, that Information Centre had been serving the people of both States. With regard to the argument of geographical imbalance used to justify the proposed closure, the Prague Centre was the only fully operational information centre anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe and could meet the special information needs of the new democracies. Furthermore, there was a growing interest among the populations of the countries concerned in the activities of the United Nations and especially in peace-keeping operations, in which the Czech Republic was participating. For such participation to be even more effective, the United Nations should explain its peace-keeping policies clearly, and the task of the Prague Centre was unique in that respect. Furthermore, the possible election of the Czech Republic to a seat on the Security Council for the period 1994-1995 might give an important new impetus to the role of the Prague Information Centre. The Government of the Czech Republic was therefore vehemently opposed to the closure of that Centre and was willing to support its continuing operation by all available means. Negotiations on a draft host country agreement had started well before there had been any question of a possible closure of the Centre. The Government of the Czech Republic had offered to provide the United Nations Information Centre with new premises, which would be refurbished at its expense, and was currently examining ways and means of providing additional resources.

72. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 47/73 B, major decisions, such as the opening or closing of information centres, were the business of the Member States. However, the Department of Public Information apparently did not deem it necessary to consult the host country about a decision to close an information centre in its capital. It was unfortunate that the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had made a linkage between the closing of the Centre at Prague and the opening of a centre at Bonn. Far from opposing the establishment of such a centre, the Czech delegation would support the relevant draft resolution. However, it strongly opposed any attempts to raise the case of Belgrade as a precedent. Where the Government of the host country was in favour of keeping an information centre, it should be consulted before any decision was taken. The Committee on Information and its officers, as well as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee should endeavour to avoid setting a dangerous precedent which might allow the Department of Public Information to open or close United Nations Information Centres arbitrarily regardless of the decisions of Member

(Mr. Bratinka, Czech Republic)

States. His delegation was convinced that it should be possible to reach a solution which would satisfy both the parties concerned. As the President of the Czech Republic, Mr. Václav Havel, had indicated in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General on the occasion of United Nations Day, the Czech Republic intended to contribute to strengthening the Organization, increasing its effectiveness and enabling it to accomplish the noble aims it had set itself.

73. Mr. TASOVSKI (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) stressed the importance of information, particularly at a time when the map of Europe was being redrawn. The new countries were meeting new challenges in the field of information. With the cold war over, the United Nations was in a position to play a greater role in international affairs, and the world was looking to it as a body which would make it possible to reach joint solutions. A broad dissemination of information was essential, since United Nations activities could only attain that objective if public opinion were well informed.

74. In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/73 B, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on whose territory there were United Nations peace-keeping forces, hoped that the Department of Public Information would continue to provide technical support for the information activities of the peace-keeping missions. That would be very important for the success of those missions.

75. While supporting the establishment of a new United Nations information centre at Sana'a, Yemen, the reactivation of the United Nations Information Centre at Tehran and the enhancement of the Information Centre at Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and Dhaka, his delegation felt that a centre should be established in its country in view of the increased needs for information stemming from the situation in the Balkans and the presence there of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Lastly, his delegation fully supported the recommendations in the report of the Committee on Information (A/48/21).

76. Mr. VALEV (Bulgaria) said that the upheavals which had occurred in the world in recent years had yet again underscored the importance of being able to obtain and freely disseminate information; that freedom, together with the freedom of expression, should be part of the foundations of any truly democratic society. It was important to diversify the sources of information in order to ensure a pluralistic press, as was the case in Bulgaria.

77. The new climate prevailing since the end of the cold war facilitated international cooperation in a number of fields, especially in information and communication. Bulgaria supported the efforts being exerted to eliminate disparities in information flows and in the communication capabilities of States, particularly where the activities of UNESCO under the International Programme for the Development of Communication were concerned.

78. The increased responsibilities which the United Nations was being asked to assume in the field of peace-keeping inspired renewed confidence in its potential, but also exposed the Organization to criticism. In order to carry out its new tasks, the Department of Public Information should continue to adapt its priorities and programmes. Bulgaria welcomed the reorganization of the services of the Department with a view to rationalizing its activities. The

(Mr. Valev, Bulgaria)

results obtained by the Department in such fields as international peace and security, disarmament, peace-keeping and peacemaking, the promotion of human rights and economic and social development underscored the relevance of its strategies. The Department should endeavour to make judicious use of its resources, carry out a periodic re-examination of its priorities and, where necessary, redirect its financial and human resources.

79. The Department should devote greater attention to activities relating to preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping and peacemaking, in which fields the Organization was assuming greater responsibilities. Bulgaria welcomed the information programmes and publications mentioned in document A/48/407, together with the proposal to establish a library service for the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace-keeping Operations. It would also be wise to consider the appointment of a spokesman for the main peace-keeping operations and to introduce an information component at the outset of preparations for peace-keeping operations.

80. The United Nations information centres played an essential role in strengthening the Organization's effectiveness and enhancing its image. His delegation supported the integration of the information centres with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices, provided that the functional autonomy of the information components was preserved. Such a solution would be cost-effective and make it possible to enlarge the Organization's information network. Bulgaria hoped for the establishment of an information service in the UNDP office at Sofia, and was prepared to cooperate fully with the Department of Public Information in that respect.

81. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) unreservedly endorsed the statement on questions relating to information made by the representative of Colombia on behalf of the Group of 77. The many new tasks falling to the Organization required a change in strategy in the Department of Public Information; the public must be made aware of the objectives of the United Nations, its successes and its future directions. At the previous meeting, the representative of Chile had presented some novel ideas in that connection and had rightly stressed that information was not intended solely for information agencies and Governments, but ultimately for the individual. It was for that reason that educational institutions had a primary role to play in that area. Her country felt that teachers at all levels were or could become the best agents of peace, informing their students about the major priority issues of concern to the United Nations, be it in the area of peace and international security, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms or cooperation in the sphere of social and economic development, environment or development, to mention only a few. The University for Peace in Costa Rica disseminated information on those questions in the Latin American and Caribbean region and elsewhere. The University, moreover, had been designated a depositary library for United Nations documents. In paragraph 15 of draft resolution B submitted by the Committee on Information in its report (A/48/21), the General Assembly encouraged continued enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials. The University for Peace aspired to become a United Nations information centre which it was in fact already unofficially. Indeed, it had

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

the requisite capacities, autonomy and logistical elements to perform that function.

82. The third regional seminar being prepared by UNESCO, the Department of Public Information and UNDP on the media, development and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Santiago, Chile, would study ways and means of increasing freedom of the press and contributing to the development of an independent and pluralistic press, both public and private, and would focus on mass communication media in rural areas and overpopulated urban areas and the participation of disadvantaged groups in the process of development and democratization.

83. Mr. SEDLAK (Slovakia) said that the geographical distribution of information centres should permit equal coverage of all Member States. As limited resources made it impossible to open a centre in each country, the establishment of a network of small information centres under the supervision of a large existing regional one, would have great advantages, as had been suggested by his delegation at the session of the Committee on Information. The countries concerned would be willing to cover most of the operating costs of such small units. Personnel costs would also be lower, since local staff was paid far less than internationally recruited staff. Local staff also had the advantage of knowing local conditions better. The redeployment of existing posts should, in the opinion of his delegation, come within the competence of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. While the Department must inevitably have the necessary freedom to manage its affairs, significant issues, such as the opening or closing of information centres, should be handled in accordance with the mandate given to the Department by the Committee. In that regard, his delegation hoped that the fate of the information centre in Prague could be resolved to the satisfaction of both sides.

84. For many missions, press releases were the only source of information on activities at Headquarters and the testing of a new format should be carefully evaluated before any final decision was taken to continue publication of press releases. The appointment of a spokesman of the Security Council would facilitate the dissemination of information in that important area, and the existing bulletin board could also include up-to-date information on the proceedings of the Security Council.

85. His delegation hoped that the Fourth Committee, like the Committee on Information, would adopt its decisions by consensus. It supported the draft resolution on the item under consideration.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS (A/C.4/48/5 and Add.1-6)

86. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had received seven communications containing requests for hearings under agenda item 38, relating to the elimination of apartheid and the establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa (A/C.4/48/5 and Add.1-6). If the Committee decided to grant those requests, the hearings would take place during the week of

(The Chairman)

8 November. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to grant the requests.

It was so decided.

87. The Committee had received a communication containing a request for hearing on the same agenda item. He suggested that, in accordance with the usual practice, the communication should be circulated as document A/C.4/48/4/Add.7 for consideration at a subsequent meeting. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to proceed in that manner.

It was so decided.

88. The CHAIRMAN also drew attention to document A/C.4/48/L.1/Add.1, containing the revised programme of work of the Committee.

AGENDA ITEM 117: ACTIVITIES OF THOSE FOREIGN ECONOMIC AND OTHER INTERESTS WHICH IMPEDE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES IN TERRITORIES UNDER COLONIAL DOMINATION AND EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE COLONIALISM, APARTHEID AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (continued)

89. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.4/48/L.11, containing amendments to the draft resolution appearing in document A/48/23 (Part III), chapter V, paragraph 13.

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (continued)

90. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.4/48/L.12, containing amendments to the draft resolution appearing in document A/48/23 (part III), chapter VI, paragraph 14.

AGENDA ITEM 118: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

91. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.4/48/L.13, containing amendments to the draft resolution appearing in document A/48/23 (Part IV), chapter VII, paragraph 15.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.